

Liberty Theater in Camas goes dark

Operator won't discuss future plans for vintage venue

By CAMIJONER
Columbian staff writer

The silver screen appears to have gone black at the historic Liberty Theater in downtown Camas, shuttered since Monday.

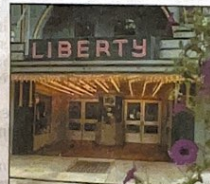
It is unclear whether the vintage Fourth Street movie venue might reopen. Operator Greg Wood told The Columbian on Friday that he was not ready to disclose future plans for the theater and would not explain the closure.

"There are a lot of balls up in the air," he said.

Wood has leased and operated the refurbished two-screen theater for more than a decade.

A closed sign remained in the Liberty Theater's ticket window all week, said Frank Hood of Camas, a frequent patron. The venue's movie posters and marquee lettering have also been taken down.

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Files/The Columbian

LIBERTY THEATER AT A GLANCE

WHAT: A vintage two-screen movie theater offering delayed first-run movies at discount prices.

WHERE: 315 N.E. Fourth Ave., Camas.

WHAT'S NEW: Operator Greg Wood closed the theater on Monday.

Theater:

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"I called them (the theater) and I couldn't reach anyone, and their Web site is blank," Hood said.

He last saw the movie "Julie & Julia" in August at the Liberty Theater with his 12-year-old daughter, Maxine Hood.

The 350-seat theater showed first-run movies at discount prices.

"We like to go there when the kid movies come out," said Hood, the father of three children. "If it has really closed that would be a shame."

The historic Camas venue opened as the Granada Theater in 1927 with a showing of the World War I silent feature "Lost at the Front." The Moorish/

Spanish-style theater with its Art Deco entryway cost about \$75,000 to build, financed by Camas businessmen C. E. Farrell, O. F. Johnson, Roy Young, A. L. Powers, and F. W. Harrington.

The theater's ornate design, with its arched and columned entryway, was dreamed up by Portland architect P. M. Hall Lewis, according to HistoryLink.org, an online encyclopedia of Washington state history. The original theater's interior furnishings cost a reported \$30,000, which included a \$12,000 organ and \$6,000 spent on seating.

It was gutted by a fire in 1994, and the longtime owners, the Farrell family, spent more than \$600,000 to renovate the theater.

The Liberty's closure this week was not a complete surprise to downtown merchant Carrie Schulstad, co-owner of The Uncommon Gift.

"On Tuesday, Greg said, 'I've closed the doors. I'm done.' He did not renew his lease," Schulstad said.

She said Wood had been trying to negotiate a deal to purchase the theater property from its longtime owners.

It would have been Wood's second purchase of a vintage movie house. In 2008, he bought the historic Roseway theater on Sandy Boulevard in Portland. He has since renovated and reopened the venue, which is now showing first-run movies.

If the Liberty closes for good, Schulstad predicted nearby retail and restaurant businesses would suffer.

"People would come downtown for dinner and a movie, so it's sad to think the restaurants might suffer," she said. "We are heartsick, because the theater is an anchor of Camas."